

This information sheet summarises research-based evidence about the risks and benefits of allowing babies to sleep in a sling or baby carrier during their daytime sleep.

For more information on this and many other topics, please visit [www.basionline.org.uk](http://www.basionline.org.uk)

Around the world, babies are carried by their mothers (and fathers, siblings and community members) throughout the day. These babies spend their days sleeping in a sling, which is usually made from a simple piece of cloth. In the UK and US, the practice of carrying a baby in a sling or soft baby carrier is known as 'baby wearing'. It's less common for parents in the UK to use a sling for their babies' daytime sleep but there are many reasons why this may be helpful.

### What are the benefits?



**Carrying your baby in a sling while they sleep may benefit them, while also allowing you to have your hands free.**

Little research has looked specifically at the benefits of carrying babies in a sling while they sleep. However research in related areas suggests that keeping close contact may have benefits for both mother and baby.

The advice for new parents is that your baby should sleep in a cot in the same room as you, day and night, until they are at least 6 months old. Studies have shown this to reduce the risk of SIDS. An English study, comparing 325 SIDS babies with 1300 control babies, found that 75% of the day-time SIDS deaths occurred while babies were alone in a room.

Using a sling or baby carrier may make it easier for you to keep your baby close during the day.

Research looking at new-born babies has shown that close contact and carrying helps to calm them, and helps them to sleep. They can hear your heartbeat, feel your movements and be reassured that you are close, without feeling the stress of being separated from you. When your baby starts to stir, you will be immediately aware of it if you are wearing them. You can pick up on their feeding cues and breast milk production is improved when you keep your baby close to you, through increased production of the hormone oxytocin, which helps bonding.

Parents who formula feed may find that wearing their baby also helps them to bond and, for Dads and partners, baby wearing may allow you to take your baby for a walk, giving your partner some time to themselves. Using a sling helps you to keep your hands free for other tasks.

## Are there any disadvantages?

Sometimes parents are worried that babies who settle to sleep in a sling or baby carrier may be less likely to settle on their own.

Parental experience highlights the variability of babies' sleep preferences. While some babies settle better when they sleep in a cot alone, others find it difficult to settle if put down for sleep alone. For some babies a calm and relaxing sleep environment involves being in contact with their mother or other caregiver – a typical practice in many countries. Some babies therefore prefer to settle by being soothed by their parents, and not by being left alone, so these babies fall asleep happily in a sling. Sometimes parents choose to wear their babies until they fall asleep and then lie them down. Some slings are easy to take off if your baby falls asleep and you want to remove the sling without disturbing them.

## Is baby-wearing safe?

Babies born prematurely who are carried (in skin-to-skin contact) by their parents have improved temperature regulation, increased oxygen saturation and, over time, better growth. The World Health Organisation supports 24 hour a day baby wearing for premature babies, until they reach their full gestational age, especially where modern medical care is unavailable to parents. While most parents won't need to consider wearing their babies in direct skin contact, or 24/7, this should offer some reassurance that wearing a baby can be safe and beneficial, even during a long daytime nap. It is important it may not be safe to sleep with your baby in a sling whilst lying down.

Placing a baby incorrectly in a sling or soft carrier can be dangerous, and lead to risk of falls, entrapment or suffocation.

Following some simple guidelines will help you to keep your baby safe in a sling.



- ✓ TIGHT
- ✓ IN VIEW AT ALL TIMES
- ✓ CLOSE ENOUGH TO KISS
- ✓ KEEP CHIN OFF THE CHEST
- ✓ SUPPORTED BACK

As with any item of baby equipment, you may want to take some time to practise using a sling or baby carrier, perhaps with another adult watching you. Be sure to follow the manufacturers' instructions for safe use of any sling, carrier or other equipment. Carefully check any sling or baby carrier that you own, buy or borrow for wear and tear. Only undertake safe activities while your child is in the sling or baby carrier – no jogging, cycling or extreme sports!

Further safety information and details of TICKS are available at [www.schoolofbabywearing.com/Images/TICKS.pdf](http://www.schoolofbabywearing.com/Images/TICKS.pdf) and at [www.which.co.uk](http://www.which.co.uk).

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For information about the different types of sling available, visit [www.babywearing.co.uk](http://www.babywearing.co.uk). Or find a sling meet, group or library or a Baby-wearing Consultant near you on their information pages.

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